

INNER EXPLORATION

Sayalay Susilā



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60 Original text: Exploration
(SN.12.66(6))



A LETTER OF APPRECIATION

Sayalay Susilā has been my meditation and Dhamma teacher for the past eight years, during which time I have interacted closely with her and participated in many of her retreats in the United States. I find her to be a remarkably open-minded teacher, who appreciates her students' sometimes

diverse meditation experiences and backgrounds from other traditions. She is also very passionate about Dhamma and teaches with an open hand, freely sharing all her knowledge. I have learned a great deal from her over the years, and my interactions with her have made me more mindful and strive harder. However, this past year I belatedly realized that owing to my strong goal-orientation, I have been closed-minded toward some of her best teachings and techniques. Seeing her teachings in an entirely new light has benefited me more than from all the previous years combined. I would like to share two of my recent discoveries in the hope that more people can benefit.

First, after listening to her many recorded talks on Suttas, I have gained profound new understanding of passages that I have read before and thought I understood. For example, in a talk on Four Foundations

of Mindfulness¹, she expounds on the introductory paragraphs of this revered Sutta systematically word by word by linking together vivid examples and passages from other Suttas, commentaries, and Abhidhamma. The result is that every phrase gains a concrete meaning pertaining to what we should do in our actual daily practice. Another example is the last talk of the same series. It centers on this brief sentence on the cessation of craving:

“Wherever in the world there is anything that is agreeable and pleasurable, there its [craving’s] cessation comes about.”

(Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta,

DN 22)

But how? Linking together important

1 On <http://sayalaysusila.net/pages/audio-gallery>, Four Foundation of Mindfulness (16–24 July 2016), 2nd talk: “Prerequisites of the Practice”.

Suttas from Saṃyutta Nikāya, Sayalay makes clear the correct way to practice according to this profound utterance of the Buddha - like discovering a hidden jewel in plain sight.

Secondly, I have been benefiting enormously by applying Sayalay Susīlā's technique on the contemplation of the mind, especially the contemplation of impermanence, to all mental phenomena. For many years, whenever my breath becomes subtle during Anapana meditations, anticipation of good results would arise, causing tension. Within a few sittings after I followed her instructions (when I was finally open-minded enough to try) to use contemplation of impermanence on this anticipation, at the moment of each arising, the problem is solved. This technique, however, is far deeper than just a tool to deal with obstacles

and hindrances during meditation. In the context of this approach on contemplating impermanence, other people's experiences, Sutta passages, and even certain Abhidhamma passages are taking on whole new and deeper meanings. Most importantly, constantly contemplating mental phenomena in this way during daily life gives us a concrete action plan as to what to do moment by moment, as the Buddha taught in the subject of this article – the “Inner Exploration” Sutta (SN 12.66).

I'd like to end by repeating a pair of Dhammapada sayings that a previous letter used:

“Though all his life a fool associates with a wise man, he no more comprehends the Truth than a spoon tastes the flavor of the soup.

Though only for a moment a discerning person associates with a wise man, quickly he comprehends the Truth, just as the tongue tastes the flavor of the soup.” - Dhammapada (64 & 65)

Last year I realized I have been a fool for many years, but I ‘m glad that at least I am starting to get a taste of “the flavor of the soup” now.

With metta and great appreciation.
Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Your devoted student, USA, 2017



I INNER EXPLORATION

is the talk given by the Buddha in a town of the Kurus called Kammāsadamma.

During the Buddha's time, the Kuru people were known to be highly intelligent and keen in practicing the Dhamma, and the Buddha gave many profound talks in Kammāsadamma, such as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and Magandiya Sutta.

One day, the Buddha asked the group

of monks: *“Do you engage in inner exploration, bhikkhus?”*

When this was said, one bhikkhu said to the Blessed One: *“Venerable sir, I engage in inner exploration.”*

The Buddha asked: *“How do you engage in inner exploration, bhikkhu?”* The bhikkhu explained, but the way he explained did not satisfy the Blessed One.

Ānanda, who understood the Buddha well, promptly invited the Buddha to give a talk: *“Now is the time for the Blessed One to explain inner exploration, and we will listen respectfully and remember it.”*

The Buddha then explained: *“Here, bhikkhus, when engaging in inner exploration, a bhikkhu explores the many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death. What is the source of this suffering? What is its origin, from what is it born and produced?”*

When what exists does aging-and-death come to be? When what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be?"

All beings love happiness and dislike suffering. However, suffering is inherent in existence. As long as life continues, suffering is inevitable. Therefore the Buddha said when engaging in inner exploration, we should explore the many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death.

Let us first explore the many kinds of diverse suffering. When we talk about suffering—also known as *dukkha* in the Buddha's teachings—we refer to the three types of suffering:

1. *Dukkha dukkha*
2. *Vipariṇāma dukkha*
3. *Sankhārā dukkha*

1. *Dukkha dukkha (Bodily suffering)*

Dukkha dukkha refers to bodily or physical suffering. As long as we have this body, we will have this suffering. Only when the body comes to termination will physical suffering will come to an end. Bodily pain is easily discernible in our meditation. When a beginner first begins meditating, he or she will feel the pain after twenty or thirty minutes. The pain can manifest itself as excessive hardness, pressure, stiffness, heat, tightness, and so forth. All these are characteristics of the four elements, as our body is composed of the four elements.

Some may feel the pain earlier if they are not used to sitting still with crossed legs. When they feel the pain, the desire to move arises and they move or change posture. However, the pain soon returns. Unable to bear the pain and without sustaining effort, they may keep changing postures whenever pain is felt

in different parts of the body, such as the neck, shoulders, thighs, buttocks, and feet.

When the pain persists, the mind starts to feel irritated. We may think: “Why on earth do I have to suffer this pain? Why don’t I get up and walk to ease the pain?” Then we might get up and practice walking meditation. After walking for a period of time, we may feel discomfort in certain parts of the body again. As long as we carry this burdensome body, we cannot escape from different types of *dukkha dukkha*—bodily suffering .

In our daily life, this *dukkha dukkha*, or bodily pain, cannot be felt as clearly as it can in a meditation retreat. This is because in our daily life, we keep changing our posture whenever we feel discomfort in any part of the body. Furthermore, our mind is restless most of the time. A restless mind is powerless. Such a mind cannot see the true nature of body—

inherently painful.

In a meditation retreat sitting, we are not allowed to move or change posture as we would like before the sitting session is over. When we maintain one posture for a certain length of time, unless we are in *jhāna* absorption, we will definitely feel the *dukkha dukkha*.

Bodily suffering can be very intense if we are subject to certain severe illnesses or if we are tortured. This is the first type of suffering.

2. Vipariṇāma dukkha (Suffering due to change)

The second type of suffering is called *vipariṇāma dukkha* — suffering due to change. This refers especially to the change of pleasant feeling. An example of this would be if you go into a restaurant while hungry. As soon as the food is served, you wolf down the food greedily

without setting up mindfulness. Every spoonful gives strong pleasant feeling and satisfaction. The pleasant feeling further conditions craving. To satiate that craving, you continue eating until you have to loosen your belt. Overeating causes heaviness of body and mind; it may even cause indigestion and a bloated stomach. Now the pleasant feeling that came from savoring the food changes to an unpleasant feeling from the unguarded tongue that led you to overeat. This is called *vipariṇāma dukkha*, the change from pleasant feeling to unpleasant feeling.

No one can avoid *vipariṇāma dukkha* because change is a universal truth. When change—in relationships, career, life, fortune, and so forth—occur, we feel the stress.

3. *Sankhārā dukkha (Suffering as a conditioned state)*

The third type of suffering is *sankhārā dukkha*, suffering as a conditioned state. Our minds and bodies are conditioned states because they are produced by kamma rooted in ignorance and craving. When that productive kamma is exhausted, our bodies come to termination, and our minds will fare on according to the ripening of new *kamma*.

Most people enjoy life, believing life is pleasurable. We try hard to keep our body healthy and strong by various means. But in a ultimate sense, our bodies undergo aging at every moment. We are, however, unable to penetrate into this truth. When death approaches, we feel sorrow and grief, unable to depart with what we hold dear. This is also *sankhārā dukkha*.

Sickness, aging, and death are natural processes that no one can escape. This is

called *sankhārā dukkha*.

What is the source of these three types of suffering?

The Buddha's teaching emphasizes using cause and effect to remove the wrong view of self. Buddha wanted us to explore further: *"What is the source of this suffering? What is its origin? From what is it born and produced?"*

Exploring the relationship of cause and effect—suffering and its origin—we come to understand that many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death are the effect of certain causes. If this is so, what are the causes for these sufferings? This is an important question for inner exploration.

The Buddha gave his answer: *"The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world, headed by aging-and-death:*

this suffering has acquisition (upadi) as its source, as its origin, and is born and produced from acquisition.”

What is this acquisition? The commentaries explain this as the five aggregates, namely:

- Form aggregate (*Rūpa khandhā*),
- Feeling aggregate (*Vedana khandhā*),
- Perception aggregate (*Sañña khandhā*),
- Volitional formations aggregate (*Sankhārā khandhā*), and
- Consciousness aggregate (*Viññāna khandhā*).

These five aggregates are ultimate reality.

Conventionally, the arising of these five aggregates is called birth of a person or a being. And when there is birth, inevitably there is aging and death. Because there is birth, one has to experience *dukkha dukkha* (bodily suffering), *vipariṇāma dukkha* (suffering due to change),

and *sankhārā dukkha* (suffering as a conditional state) during one's life.

In between birth and death, there is sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair; association with the unloved; separation from the loved; and not getting what we want—all of which are suffering. This is known as the noble truth of suffering, the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha.

If having acquisition or having the five aggregates is the Truth of Suffering, then what is the source of this acquisition? What is its origin, from what is it born and produced? We can explore with insight in the sequence explained below:

The Buddha said: *“Acquisition has craving as its source, craving as its origin; it is born and produced from craving. When there is craving, acquisition comes to be. When there is no craving, acquisition does not come to be.”*

Craving is the second noble truth—the truth of the origin of suffering. Why do acquisitions or the five aggregates come to be? The Buddha gave his precise answer, getting at the very root cause—craving.

In order to remove the suffering inherent in the five aggregates, we need to know well the origin or the cause of our suffering—craving, so that we know how to deal with it skillfully and defeat it. Without tackling the origin of suffering, suffering—which is only the effect, cannot come to an end. Therefore, as smart practitioners, we investigate and tackle the cause of our suffering, not the effect.

There are three types of craving:

1. *Kāma taṇhā* (Craving for sensual pleasure)
2. *Bhāva taṇhā* (Craving for existence)
3. *Vibhāva taṇhā* (Craving for non-existence)

1. *Kāma taṇhā* (Craving for sensual pleasure)

Kāma taṇhā is craving for sensual pleasure. How do we enjoy sensual pleasure? And through what doors do we enjoy sensual pleasure? We enjoy sensual pleasure through the six sense doors and their respective sense objects. For example, our greedy eyes always seek visible objects to see, especially agreeable and beautiful objects. When an agreeable visible object comes into contact with the eyes, we feel pleasant and gratified. This is how we enjoy sensual pleasures through the eyes. Similarly, our ears want to hear pleasant sounds, such as music or the sweet voices of the opposite sex, which make us happy. Our nose enjoys lovely fragrances. Our tongue enjoys delicious flavors. Our body enjoys touch—soft touch, the touch of our loved ones, and so on. And our mind enjoys fantasies—we can think freely about whatever we want and make

ourselves happy. A poor man may think that he possesses a luxurious car and a mansion, accompanied by many beautiful women. Daydreaming is a type of mental enjoyment. This is called *Kāma taṇhā*, craving for sensual pleasures.

2. *Bhāva taṇhā* (Craving for existence)

The craving for sensual pleasures extends to another craving called *bhāva taṇhā*, or craving for existence. Only through existence are the five aggregates acquired. Without existence, there are no five aggregates, no six sense bases or, in other words, no body and mind to enjoy sensual pleasure through contact with the six sense objects. In order to continue enjoying sensual pleasure, we crave for existence—also known as the five aggregates or birth or a new life. Such craving is called craving for existence.

For some beings, enjoyment of sensual pleasure through the body appears to

be repulsive. But they still crave for existence—an existence with mind only, without body. They practice immaterial *jhānas* to be reborn in an immaterial realm of existence. The beings that stay in immaterial realms do not have a body to enjoy gross sensual pleasures, but they enjoy having a subtle mind, a mind endowed with the bliss and peace of *jhāna* concentration. These beings crave for existence for the sake of *jhānic* bliss. This is also the second type of craving—craving for existence.

These two cravings—craving for sensual pleasures and craving for existence—are often accompanied by the wrong view of eternalism, or the idea that it is the same being or soul who enjoys sensual pleasures from one existence to the next. Say, for example, you are blessed with good health and wealth in this life and you enjoy sensual pleasures excessively. Due to negligence, you become strongly attached to the enjoyment of sensual

pleasure. This inclines your mind to have a future human life or even a divine life so that the “same self” can continue to enjoy the same or higher sensual pleasure in the future. You wrongly grasp the view that it is the same person, or the same self, that transmigrates from one life to another life. This is called *sassata diṭṭhi*, the wrong view of eternalism. With ardent insight practice, we find out that even during this same lifetime, there’s no “same self” from day to day, or even from moment to moment.

3. *Vibhava taṇhā* (Craving for non-existence)

The third type of craving is *vibhāva taṇhā*, craving for non-existence. This type of craving is associated with the wrong view of annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*). The person who holds the wrong view of annihilationism believes that nothing exists after death. Such a person does not believe in the law of kamma and is

therefore not afraid of any wrongdoing.

These three types of cravings are the root causes for any renewed existence. When we come into being, especially in a sensual realm or fine material realm of existence, we acquire a body and mind. When we have a body and mind, we inevitably undergo aging, sickness, and death—the major suffering in life. Without body and mind, there is no aging, sickness, and death. This is eternal law. No one can escape from this law. Not even the Buddha.

Therefore, it is said that craving is the truth of the origin of suffering—the second noble truth, or *samudaya sacca*.

Where does craving arise?

Now comes another important question that needs our serious attention if we are eager to get rid of craving: **When this**

craving arises, where does it arise? Since craving is the origin of all suffering, we must know where it arises. And: **When it settles down, upon what does it settle?**

As we explore inwardly, we understand that, *“Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.”*

What are the things that have a pleasant and agreeable nature that cause craving to arise?

Explore inwardly through your own day-to-day experience and you are certain to find out the answer.

Six Sense Bases

Our eyes, nose, ears, tongue, body, and mind have a pleasant and agreeable nature to us. It is there that this craving

arises when it arises; it is there that it settles when it settles down.

The eyes appear pleasant and agreeable to us, do they not? With the eyes, we can greedily see whatever objects we like that please and gratify the heart. So the eyes are considered pleasant to us. With the body, we can enjoy pleasant touch with a loved one, and so on. With the ears, we can hear sounds we like to hear, such as music, songs, praise, or the voice of the opposite sex. The same goes for the other sense bases. Therefore, all the six internal bases—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—have a pleasant and agreeable nature. From there, craving arises and settles.

Six Sense Objects

As craving is insatiable, it proliferates and extends from the sense bases to the sense objects. We do not crave

only for our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, but we also crave for their respective objects of form, sound, smell, taste, tangible objects, and mental objects. The external sense objects—such as sensually enticing female forms—have the agreeable and pleasant nature that gratifies the eyes of men.

During the Buddha's time, the newly ordained Venerable Vangisa had been left behind as the caretaker of a pleasant monastery at Alavi. A number of beautifully adorned women, wishing to see that place, visited there. When the eyes of Venerable Vangisa came to contact with those beautiful women, lust immediately infested his mind through his unguarded eyes. (SN 8:1) The beautiful women had a pleasant and agreeable nature, causing craving to arise and settle down there.

The Buddha said: *"I do not see even one other form that so obsesses the mind of*

a man as the form of a woman. The form of a woman obsesses the mind of a man.”
(AN1(1)) This holds true for both men and women.

Apart from form, craving also arises and settles on pleasant and agreeable sounds, fragrances, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects.

Here is another illustration of how craving arises and settles on pleasant and agreeable sounds. The Buddha had a half-brother named Nanda. On Nanda's wedding day, the Buddha visited him and passed his own alms bowl to Nanda. Nanda received the bowl, but did not know what to do as Buddha did not say anything, but just turned and walked away. So Nanda, out of respect for the Buddha, followed him while holding the bowl. While he was following the Buddha, Nanda's bride saw him. Worried that Nanda might decide to become a monk, she cried out enticingly, "Oh, my dear, please come back!" But

due to fear of the Buddha, Nanda dared not turn back.

So Nanda followed the Buddha to the monastery. Then the Buddha asked him, "Do you want to become a monk?" Of course, Nanda had no desire to become a monk. However, instead of saying no, for some reason he nodded his head. So the Buddha ordained him immediately. Because Nanda became a monk, not by his own choice, but out of fear of the Buddha, he did not enjoy his monkhood and his mind would not settle on his meditation subject. His mind was instead preoccupied with longing for his beloved fiancée. The sweet sound of his fiancée crying, "Oh, my dear, please come back!" was deeply embedded in his ear.

As the days passed, Nanda became emaciated. All he could remember was that pleasant sound of "Oh, my dear, please come back!" His craving arose and settled on that sound. Knowing his plight,

the Buddha used skillful means to arouse Nanda's spiritual urgency and Nanda was finally able to let go of his desire for his fiancée. He secluded himself from the company of monks, strove diligently, and became an arahant.

Six Types of Consciousness

Apart from the six sense bases and six sense objects, the Buddha also mentioned that the six types of consciousness—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind-consciousness—are agreeable and pleasurable, and there craving arises and establishes itself. Without eye-consciousness, even though there is eye base and form, pleasurable seeing cannot be achieved.

Six Contacts

The coming together of eye-consciousness, eye base, and form is eye-contact. Therefore pleasant eye-contact

also causes craving to arise and establish itself on eye-contact. The same goes for pleasurable ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind-contact. As contacts are continually arising, our senses are constantly exposed to the impingement, or contact, of sense objects.

Six Feelings

The pleasant contacts of the senses cause pleasant feeling to arise. For example, when agreeable food touches the tongue, pleasant feeling arises; when agreeable sound, such as sound of praise, touches the ear, pleasant feeling arises. Dependent on pleasant feeling, craving also arises and settles on pleasant feeling born of contact.

Six Types of Perceptions

Similarly, craving also arises and settles on six types of perceptions, when we perceive each of the six sense objects as

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pleasurable, permanent, and perceived by a “self”. For example, if we previously enjoyed a special dish of food, leaving a mark in our minds, and afterwards, before a meal, we see this dish again, the eye-contact leads to the perception of the food as “that same tasty dish.” This perception leads to the arising of craving even before the tongue actually tastes the food.

Six Volitions

The way we perceive things also causes volition, or will to act. For example, when one perceives that watching a show is pleasurable, one tends to indulge in it. There are six volitions for six sense objects to gratify oneself. Therefore, the Buddha said: *“Volition in regard to the six sense objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.”*

Thinking and Pondering

What one perceives, one thinks about. If one perceives that life is full of happiness, then one thinks and ponders about having renewed existence again and again. Even when we are not impinged by pleasant and agreeable sense objects in the present, craving arises when we delight in thinking and pondering on past or future pleasant and agreeable sense objects. When we take delight in remembering the great good we had or daydream about soothing bodily touches in the future, that's when craving arises and settles on thinking and pondering.

In short, when six internal objects, six external objects, six types of consciousness , six contacts of the senses, six feelings born of contacts, six perceptions, six volitions, thinking and pondering are regarded as **pleasant and agreeable, it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it**

settles when it settles down.

The above-mentioned mental and physical objects can be categorized within the five aggregates of clinging. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, with their respective objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and tangible objects, belong to the form aggregate. Perception, feeling, contact, volition, consciousness, and so on belong to the mental aggregates.

Craving Arises Due to Distorted Perception

The Buddha continued on to say: *“Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past, present, and future regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure; they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving, they nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition, they nurture*

suffering.”

This important statement invites us to reflect deeply. It helps us to understand the way of the practice.

We know that the origin of suffering is craving. Why does craving arise? The Buddha said craving arises when we regard everything that is pleasant and agreeable as permanent, as happiness, as a self, as healthy, and secure.

From this short but precise answer, we come to know that if we perceive wrongly in regard to things that are pleasant and see them as permanent, as happiness, as a self, as healthy and secure—craving will arise.

In nurturing craving, we nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition, we nurture suffering. In nurturing suffering, we will not be free from birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain,

displeasure, and despair. The Buddha reminded us that if we nurture craving, we cannot be free from suffering.

Undoing Distorted Perception

So, in order to remove craving, what should we do? We should first undo our distorted perception that pleasant things are permanent, happiness, and a self. When the eyes come into contact with a pleasant form, we should not think, perceive, and regard eyes and pleasant form as permanent, as happiness, and as self. Neither should we consider eye contact and seeing-consciousness to be permanent, happiness, and a self. Instead we should perceive them as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, and as insecure.

The Buddha said: *“Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past, present, and future regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent,*

as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful, then they abandon craving. In abandoning craving, they abandon acquisition. In abandoning acquisition, they abandon suffering.”

From this perspective, we understand the correct way of practicing is to let go of craving by perceiving everything that has a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, suffering, non-self, as a disease, and as frightening. Apart from the six sense bases and six sense objects, we should extend the same understanding to any consciousness, pleasant contacts, pleasant feelings born of contacts, perception, volition, thinking, and pondering.

How do we put this into practice?

We can contemplate any arising phenomena born of contact as being

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impermanent, suffering, and non-self. However, let us focus on contemplating arising and falling, or impermanence, first.

When there is impingement of the six sense bases with the six pleasant sense objects, pleasant feeling arises. We arouse mindfulness first, so as to be aware of the arising of pleasant feeling, by mentally noting, “Pleasant feeling has arisen in me.”

While mindfulness keeps the object in view, the activity of the mind slows down. This gives a chance for wisdom to arise and penetrate into the true nature of the object. Therefore, we can say mindfulness prepares the work for wisdom to see the three common characteristics of **impermanence** (anicca), **suffering** (dukkha), and **non-self** (anattā).

It is for this reason the Buddha said:
“Just as a farmer has first to plough

the ground in order to be able to sow, so too mindfulness fulfills an important preparatory role for the arising of wisdom.”

Paying Attention to Impermanence

After mindfulness has the object in view, apply wisdom by paying attention to or contemplating that pleasant feeling as *anicca*, or “impermanent, impermanent”, or “vanishing, vanishing”, or “inconstant, inconstant”, or “falling away, falling away”. Here, contemplating impermanence means mentally noting and trying to see the vanishing, falling away, or disappearing of that pleasant feeling.

The characteristic of impermanence will not become apparent when we do not pay attention to the rise and fall of the object observed. In this case, it is concealed by the compactness of continuity. However,

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when the compactness of continuity is disrupted by discerning the vanishing of the object, things become disconnected and the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature.

The commentary to MN 22 says: “Having been, it is not, therefore it is impermanent. It is impermanent for four reasons:

- i. in the sense of the state of rising and falling,
- ii. of change,
- iii. of temporariness,
- iv. of denying permanence or lasting.”

By contemplating a phenomenon as “vanishing, vanishing”, the characteristic of impermanence becomes clear. The phenomenon is seen not only as perpetually renewed, but as short-lived, like a dew-drop at sunrise, like a bubble on the water, like a lightning flash, or like a dream. And they appear without a core,

like a mirage, unreal. How can the mind attach and cling to fleeting phenomena that come and go so speedily? Therefore, it is said that contemplating impermanence can block craving from developing.

Benefits of Contemplating Impermanence

Apart from the most fruitful result of getting rid of craving, there are other benefits of contemplating impermanence:

1. Contemplating impermanence helps to get rid of whatever defilement has arisen in mind, and lets the mind return to peace. I would like to share one of my student's experiences with you.

My student is a Dhamma teacher in the US. She participated in one of my retreats held in the US many years ago. One day, early in the morning, her mind was assailed by anger. She was very annoyed and disappointed in herself. She thought

that with this anger in mind, she would not be able to meditate well that day. As you might know, anger is one of the five hindrances, so when anger arises, the mind is irritated and meditation becomes difficult unless you have the skill to deal with it.

Suddenly, she remembered that I had previously taught her to contemplate impermanence on whatever emotion had arisen. She told me later: “When you shared with us contemplation of impermanence on whatever emotion has arisen, such as craving, anger, or jealousy and so on, I had doubt. I didn’t think that just contemplating impermanence could get rid of emotional states.”

As she was open-minded, she decided to give it a try—to contemplate her anger as impermanent. She contemplated her anger many times as “impermanent, impermanent, impermanent.” To her surprise, her anger subsided in no

time, leaving no trace in the heart. She was overwhelmed with joy and quickly came to me and reported: “The word impermanence is like a magic mantra. I am going to write down the word—impermanence on many papers and paste them all over my house when I go back home. This will help to remind me not to forget contemplation of impermanence.”

So you can see from her experience how effective this practice is; otherwise, her mind would have been overwhelmed by anger. If she had found no way to escape from anger, she would have spent a bad day accumulating more unwholesome mental kamma.

I need to remind you that not only defilements of the mind should be noted, but even the wholesome states of mind such as a concentrated mind, happy mind, faithful mind, generous mind, and the contemplating mind itself should all be contemplated in the same way. The

purpose is not to develop attachment to certain states of mind.

2. Contemplating impermanence also tunes or harmonizes the mind with reality. The reality of the world is impermanence. However, our distorted perception—seeing things as permanent—blocks us from seeing the truth. We regard permanence as the truth. With such distorted perception in mind, how are we going to harmonize with the truth—that things are impermanent? Even when impermanence presents itself, we are unable to see it and we simply let it pass by without developing any insight.

Therefore, without tuning the mind in to reality, it becomes difficult to see impermanence when it happens. In order to harmonize or synchronize the mind with reality—which is impermanent—our perception must regard things as changing. Only then can these two merge together.

3. Contemplation of impermanence further leads to seeing dukkha and non-self (anattā) in phenomena. When formations are repeatedly seen in a constant flux, then they appear frightening, like a murderer with an uplifted sword. They appear as oppressive, as a terror, as suffering, and as unsatisfactory to the mind of the yogi. Without seeing impermanence, it is very difficult to understand the suffering of being oppressed by the incessant arising and falling of phenomena.

By seeing impermanence and suffering, we also realize that there is no permanent self that exercises control over the whole process. When we talk about “self,” it means something over which we can exercise control. But the process of constantly arising and passing away is beyond our control. The characteristics of non-self, or anattā, are also beyond our control. So by seeing impermanence and suffering, we also see non-self.

Approaching Insight Knowledge of Disenchantment

The uncontrollable nature of formations in regard to their constant arising and passing away is wearying. The mind gradually gets disenchanted with what is impermanent. Having seen repeatedly the arising and passing away and the oppressive nature of this mind and body, we become disillusioned and the insight knowledge of disenchantment is achieved. We might then think we have been cheated for a long time by our distorted perception of permanence, happiness, and self in regard to mind and body.

Before reaching this stage, we take delight in mind and body, delusively thinking they are a source of happiness. Just like a blind man who was given a soiled shirt, but was told it was white. Wrongly grasping the soiled shirt as white, he was delighted and immediately put it on. He went around boasted that his dirty black

shirt was a clean white shirt.

When that blind man accepted the soiled shirt, put it on, and boasted about it, did he do so knowing and seeing, or out of faith in the man who gave it to him? Of course he did it not knowing and seeing, but out of faith.

As long as the man remained blind, he continued to be fooled. When he regained his eyesight, he saw the soiled shirt as it really was and became disillusioned. He realized he had been fooled by the man who had given him the shirt. Feeling disgust and dispassion toward the soiled shirt, he immediately took it off.

This man's blindness is like the ignorance that covers the true nature of phenomena. The man himself is like the mind. Similarly, when we are blind, we are ignorant of the true nature of phenomena. But once we see the truth of impermanence, suffering, and the non-

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self nature of mind and body, we will feel dispassion toward our mind and body and will not take delight in them any longer.

After feeling disenchanted with mind and body, we let go of passion and craving for them. When we are devoid of passion and craving in regard to mind and body, then sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair no longer arise. Instead, detachment from the mind and body arises.

Attachment to the mind and body is the origin of suffering—the second noble truth, that must be abandoned. Without developing disenchantment towards the mind and body, it is impossible for us to be liberated from this attachment. In order to remove this origin (the cause) we have to keep contemplating all pleasant and agreeable objects as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful, as a tumor, as empty of self, and as void.

Remember what Buddha said: *“Whatever ascetics and brahmins regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful, as a tumor, as empty of self, and as void, then they abandon craving.”*

Only by repeatedly seeing its impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature does one start to let go of craving or attachment. This is wise attention and it is important in the attainment of the stream-enterer (sotāpanna) path and fruition.

Making Wise Attention into the True Nature of Phenomena a Habit

Once we have practiced in this way for some time and have become familiar with applying mindfulness and wisdom, we do not have to sit on the cushion to do it—we can do it when we are moving around.

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For example, if our eyes come into contact with an enemy and an unpleasant feeling arises, we can be mindful of the arising of unpleasant feeling, and then further take the unpleasant feeling as an object, paying attention to its “vanishing, vanishing”. We should try to see the vanishing or disappearing of that unpleasant feeling.

We can also expand our comprehension by depersonalizing the unpleasant feeling. How? By mentally noting, “Unpleasant feeling is just unpleasant feeling; it is not a self.” This is how we depersonalize it.

Then we can further investigate cause and effect to fully understand the non-self characteristic of that unpleasant feeling. We can note, “This painful feeling arises due to a cause, not without cause. What is its cause?”

Upon investigation, we may find that unpleasant feeling arises because of eye contact with unpleasant form—perhaps

an enemy. So unpleasant eye contact is the cause; the arising of unpleasant feeling is the effect. Then we see that neither eye contact nor unpleasant feeling is a self. Unpleasant feeling is just a conditionally arising mental phenomena. It comes and goes so long as we do not attach to it as “myself.”

In another moment, our eyes come into contact with a very charming or sensually-enticing form, and lust arises. For as long as our mindfulness is keen and as long as we can remember, we should contemplate the “vanishing, vanishing” of our craving. We may be surprised to see that the craving is not as deeply rooted as we previously thought. By contemplating the impermanence of craving, craving loses its power to affect us.

This is how mindfulness and wisdom protect our minds. One of my students shared this story with me in her letter of

appreciation:

Sayalay's teaching on cultivating mindfulness with wisdom was a precious gift to me in protecting the mind. It is a wise skill that I still rely on to this day to keep my mind wholesome, regardless of my encounters. Her teachings on impermanence and renunciation of the mind and body make me feel the beauty of the Dhamma and help me to live life with ease. They arouse my enthusiasm and sense of urgency to practice diligently, which has led me to the realization that liberation from certain defilements of the mind and entering the supramundane paths of a Noble One is possible in this very life here and now!

So make contemplation on impermanence your refuge.

Once you are familiar with contemplation on impermanence, to sharpen your insight, attend to the five aggregates in different ways: as unsatisfactory, as a disease, as Mara’s bait, as a murderer with a raised sword, as a tumor, as an arrow, as painful, as an affliction, as alien, as dissolution, as void, as empty, and as not-self. In this way, you can become liberated from clinging and craving—the root cause of suffering.

Maha Koṭṭhita once asked Venerable Sāriputta: *“Venerable sir, how should one regard the five aggregates to attain to the stage of sotāpanna?”*

I think everyone wants to know the answer. The gates of the four woeful states are permanently closed to one who has attained the stage of sotāpanna. This is because the identity view—the

main factor responsible for casting us down to the four woeful states has been completely uprooted. A sotāpanna may still enjoy sensual pleasures, but there is no chance that he will fall into the four woeful states in future rebirths. However, as long as one has not attained the stage of sotāpanna, one needs to be careful while enjoying sensual pleasures!

Ven. Sāriputta answered: *“You need to attend to the five aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, as a disease, as a tumor, as an arrow, as painful, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as empty, and as not-self.”*

If we attend to the five aggregates in the way mentioned above, our minds will turn away from the grasping of these aggregates, and we can finally attain the stage of sotāpanna.

Summary

To summarize, first ask yourself: Where does all this suffering—headed by aging and death originated?

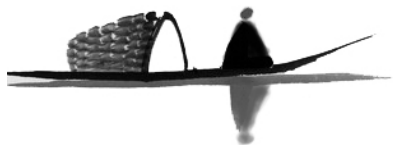
You will find out that suffering comes from craving. Then explore further and ask yourself: When and where does craving arise and settle? You will discover through your own experience that craving arises and settles down on pleasant and agreeable objects.

What are these pleasant and agreeable objects? They are the six sense bases, six sense objects, contacts, feelings, perceptions, volitions, consciousness, and so on. All these objects are subject to clinging. When we regard them as permanent, happiness, and self, then we nurture craving.

How do we not nurture craving? We must keep contemplating them as

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impermanent, suffering, not-self, as a disease, as fearful, etc. Only then we are able to abandon craving. In abandoning craving, we will be free from all different types of suffering.



E
XPLORATION
(SN 12:66(6))

Thus have I heard :

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Kurus, where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadamma. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "*Bhikkhus!*"

"*Venerable sir!*" those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Do you engage in inward exploration,

bhikkhus?"

When this was said, one bhikkhu said to the Blessed One: *"Venerable sir, I engage in inward exploration."*

"How do you engage in inward exploration, bhikkhu?"

The bhikkhu then explained but the way he explained did not satisfy the Blessed One. Then the Venerable Ānanda said: *"Now is the time for this, Blessed One! Now is the time for this, Fortunate One! Let the Blessed One explain inward exploration. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the bhikkhus will remember it."*

"Then listen and attend closely, Ānanda, I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Here, bhikkhus, when engaged in inward exploration, a bhikkhu explores thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death: what is the source of this suffering, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does aging-and-death come to be? When

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what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be?'

"As he explores he understands thus:

'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the worldhead by aging-and-death: this suffering has acquisition as its source, acquisition as its origin; it is born and produced from acquisition. When there is acquisition, aging-and-death comes to be; when there is no acquisition, aging-and-death does not come to be.'

"He understands aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading on that is in conformity with its cessation. He practises in that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practising for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of aging-and-death.

"Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: 'What is the source of this acquisition, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does acquisition come to be? When what is absent does acquisition not come to be?'

"As he explores he understands thus:

'Acquisition has craving as its source, craving as

its origin; it is born and produced from craving. When there is craving, acquisition comes to be; when there is no craving, acquisition does not come to be.'

"He understands acquisition, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading on that is in conformity with its cessation. He practises in that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practising for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of acquisition.

"Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: 'When this craving arises, where does it arise? When it settles down, upon what does it settle?'

"As he explores he understands thus:

'Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.' And what in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature? The eye has a pleasant and agreeable nature in the world: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. So too the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind have a pleasant and

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agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.

"Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past regarded that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they nurtured craving. In nurturing craving they nurtured acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they nurtured suffering. In nurturing suffering they were not freed from birth, aging, and death; they were not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they were not freed from suffering, I say.

"Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the future will regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they will nurture craving. In nurturing craving they will nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they will nurture suffering. In nurturing suffering they will not be freed from birth, aging, and death; they will not be freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they will not be freed from suffering, I say.

"Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and

agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving they are nurturing acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they are nurturing suffering. In nurturing suffering they are not freed from birth, aging, and death; they are not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say.

"Suppose, bhikkhus, there was a bronze cup of a beverage having a fine colour, aroma, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. They would tell him: 'Good man, this beverage in the bronze cup has a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink it if you wish. If you drink it, it will gratify you with its color, aroma, and taste, but by drinking it you will meet death or deadly suffering.' Suddenly, without reflecting, he would drink the beverage—he would not reject it—and thereby he would meet death or deadly suffering.

"So too, bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past ... in the future ... at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent,

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as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving ... they are not freed from suffering, I say.

"Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past regarded that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they abandoned craving. In abandoning craving they abandoned acquisition. In abandoning acquisition they abandoned suffering. In abandoning suffering they were freed from birth, aging, and death; they were freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they were freed from suffering, I say.

"Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the future will regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they will abandon craving. In abandoning craving ... they will be freed from suffering, I say.

"Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as nonself, as a disease, as fearful: they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving ...

they are freed from suffering, I say.

"Suppose, bhikkhus, there was a bronze cup of a beverage having a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. They would tell him: 'Good man, this beverage in the bronze cup has a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink it if you wish. If you drink it, it will gratify you with its color, aroma, and taste, but by drinking it you will meet death or deadly suffering.' Then the man would think: 'I can quench my thirst with water, whey, porridge, or soup, but I should not drink that beverage, since to do so would lead to my harm and suffering for a long time.' Having reflected, he would not drink the beverage but would reject it, and thereby he would not meet death or deadly suffering.

"So too, bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past ... in the future ... at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving ... they are freed from suffering, I say."

"Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down."





SHARING OF MERITS

Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti
sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso jināti;
Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti,
taṇhakkhaya sabbadukkaṃ jināti.
(Dhp. 354)

A gift of Dhamma conquers all gifts;
the taste of Dhamma conquers all tastes;
a delight in Dhamma conquers all delights;
the ending of craving conquers all suffering & stress.
(Dhp.354)

Ciraṃ Tiṭṭhatu Saddhammo!
Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

May the True Dhamma Endure for A Long Time!

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Ben Zhang, USA

G.

Sayalay Susīlā

*May all beings share this merit and attain eternal
happiness — Nibbāna*



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